

# Letter from Taizé

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28 December 2005  
- 1 January 2006  
**Taizé**  
**Milan**

*At the end of this year, tens of thousands of young adults will gather in Italy, in the city of Milan. The 28th young adult European meeting prepared by Taizé, it will be the next stage of the "pilgrimage of trust on earth".*

IN MEMORY OF JOHN PAUL II

## A Soul Attentive to Preparing a Future of Peace

Taizé's relations with the future Pope John Paul II go back forty-three years. Brother Roger met Karol Wojtyla in 1962, at the Vatican Council, when he was auxiliary bishop of Krakow. In the morning, before the council sessions, both used to go to pray in a chapel of Saint Peter's Basilica, and that is how they became acquainted. The brothers of Taizé then invited the young bishop to have a meal with

them in their apartment in Rome.

When he was archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla visited Taizé twice, in 1964 and 1968. Later, on several occasions, Brother Roger was asked to go and speak at the yearly miners' pilgrimage in Silesia, Poland. Cardinal Wojtyla presided at that pilgrimage and invited the brothers to stay in his home in Krakow.

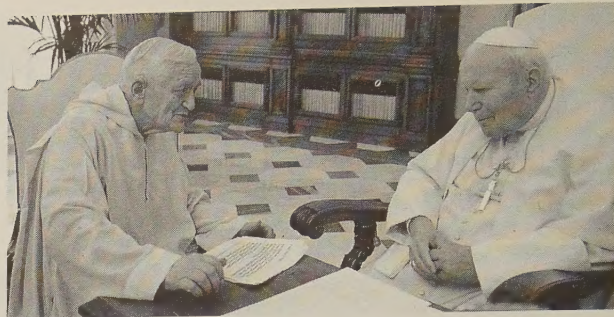
Elected pope in 1978, he

received Brother Roger in private audience each year until last year, including once for a visit when he was in hospital following the attack on his life in 1981. He welcomed thousands of young adults to Rome for three end-of-the-year European meetings.

During one of his trips to France, the pope stopped in Taizé, on October 5th, 1986. This Letter recounts that visit.



# Testimony of Brother Roger



*Last private audience with  
John Paul II, March 20th, 2004.*

Pope John Paul II kindled hope in many of the young. He awakened many to trust in God. The heart is filled with gratitude for the ministry of peace and communion which he exercised for more than twenty-six years.

It was in 1962, at the Vatican Council, that I met the man who, sixteen years later, was to become pope. John Paul II received me in private audience each year and there were times when my thoughts went out to the trials in his life: in his childhood, he had lost his mother, and in his youth his father and his only brother. And I said to myself: try to find a word to gladden, and even console, his heart, by speaking of the hope that we were discovering among many young people, and by assuring him of the trust our community bore towards him.

Consumed by the fire of love of the Church and of the human family, John Paul II did everything possible to communicate that flame. He breathed life into the universality of the Church, among other things by going to most of the countries of the world to meet people, sometimes to challenge them, and often to express God's compassion. The more than one hundred journeys he made remain a clear expression of a soul so attentive to preparing a future of peace.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5TH, 1986

## John Paul II Visits Taizé

Pope John Paul II has decided to stop by Taizé during his trip to France.

The pope has been in Lyon since the previous day, and will also go to Paray-le-Monial, Ars and Annecy.

Large tents have been attached to the Church of Reconciliation. Seven thousand young people have arrived. Throughout the night, some of them take turns praying in silence until the following morning. At 8:30am, after having sung with the young people, the brothers leave the church to welcome the pope. The entire region is shrouded in a dense fog. The helicopters could not leave their hangars and so the pope has to come from Lyon in an ordinary car.

When he passes in front of the bells, the fog keeps John Paul II from seeing that, on the largest of the five bells, in remembrance of his visit, the words he spoke at the beginning of his ministry

have been engraved: "Don't be afraid; open wide the doors to Christ."

Entering the Church of Reconciliation, John Paul II sits down on an armchair of wood and straw. Brother Roger, surrounded by children, says a few words of welcome. Then the pope speaks to the young people. He explains why he has come to Taizé and what the Church expects of them:

### The Church needs your enthusiasm

*"(...) Like you, pilgrims and friends of the community, the pope is only passing through. But one passes through Taizé as one passes close to a spring of water. The traveller stops, quenches his thirst and con-*

*tinues on his way. The brothers of the community, you know, do not want to keep you. They want, in prayer and silence, to enable you to drink the living water promised by Christ, to know his joy, to discern his presence, to respond to his call, then to set out again to witness to his love and to serve your brothers and sisters in your parishes, your schools, your universities, and in all your places of work.*

Today in all the Churches and Christian communities, and even among the highest political leaders in the world, the Taizé Community is known for the trust always full of hope that it places in the young. It is above all because I share this trust and this hope that I have come here this morning.

Dear young people, to bring to the world the joyful news of the Gospel, the Church needs your enthusiasm and your generosity. You know, it can happen that your elders,



# May the Lord Keep You Little

During his meeting with the brothers of the community, the Pope left them a text

which has become part of the *Sources of Taizé*:

Dear Brothers, in the family-like intimacy of this brief meeting, I would like to express to you my affection and my trust with these simple words with which Pope John XXIII, who loved you so much, greeted Brother Roger one day: "Ah, Taizé, that little springtime!"

My desire is that the Lord may keep you like a springtime that blossoms and that he keep you little, in the joy of the Gospel and the transparency of brotherly love.

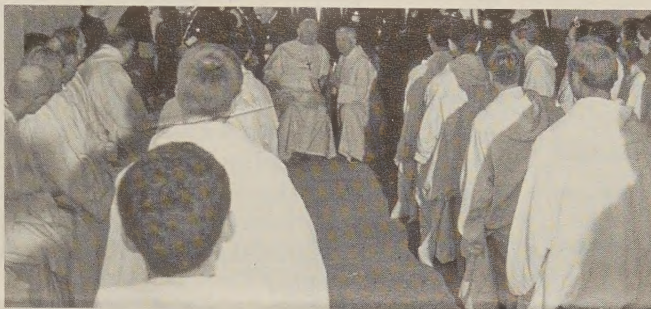
Each of you came here to live in the mercy of God and the community of his brothers. In consecrating your whole being to Christ for love of him, you have found both of these.

But in addition, although you did not look for it, you have seen young people from everywhere come to you by the thousands, attracted by your prayer and your community life. How can we not think that these young people are the gift and the means that the Lord gives you to stimulate you to remain together, in the joy and the freshness of your gift, as a springtime for all who are searching for true life?

Throughout your days, work, rest, prayer, everything is enlivened by the Word of God that takes hold of you, that keeps you little, in other words children of the heavenly Father, brothers and servants of all in the joy of the Beatitudes.

I do not forget that in its unique, original and in a certain sense provisional vocation, your community can awaken astonishment and encounter incomprehension and suspicion. But because of your passion for the reconciliation of all Christians in a full communion, because of your love for the Church, you will be able to continue, I am sure, to be open to the will of the Lord.

By listening to the criticisms or suggestions



of Christians of different Churches and Christian communities and keeping what is good, by remaining in dialogue with all but not hesitating to express your expectations and your projects, you will not disappoint the young, and you will be instrumental in making sure that the effort desired by Christ to recover the visible unity of his Body in the full communion of one same faith never slackens. You know how much I personally consider ecumenism a necessity incumbent upon me, a pastoral priority in my ministry for which I count on your prayer.

By desiring to be yourselves a "parable of community", you will help all whom you meet to be faithful to their church affiliation, the fruit of their education and their choice in conscience, but also to enter more and more deeply into the mystery of communion that the Church is in God's plan.

By his Gift to his Church, Christ liberates in every Christian forces of love and gives them a universal heart to be creators of justice and peace, able to unite to their contemplation a struggle along the lines of the Gospel for the integral liberation of human beings, of every human being and of the entire human being.

Dear Brothers, I thank you for having invited me and thus having given me the opportunity to return to Taizé. May the Lord bless you and keep you in his peace and his love!



Does the Gospel concern Christians only?

According to the words of Christ, the Gospel is for all humanity: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). But the idea of mission is embarrassing to many. Must the entire world adopt the Christian religion? Does not missionary activity conceal a desire to dominate? The expansion of Christianity sometimes went hand in hand with wars of conquest. Jesus sent out his disciples "like lamps in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3), and yet at times Christians have behaved like wolves in the midst of lambs.

Perhaps for this reason, many Christians have become prudent. We have learned not to judge other religions. And we Christians are the first ones who have to take the Gospel seriously. So some people even ask themselves: since world peace depends in part upon a respectful coexistence of different religious communities, would not the best thing be for everyone to keep their beliefs to themselves and let others find their way in their own respective traditions?

The Gospel, in the original meaning of the term, is not a religious teaching. Gospel means "good news". News is not something that is taught, but rather communicated. In the ancient world, for example, the birth or inauguration of a new emperor was proclaimed as "good news". In the Bible as well, the Gospel announces the beginning of a reign. But here, the king is God. Jesus and his apostles proclaimed the reign of God. The Gospel is "the good news of [God's] reign" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14).

God rules: this is good news promising a future of peace for all the nations of the earth. If God is king, then the law of the jungle and despair will not have the last word. God's reign is a mystery (Mark 4:11), but not an abstract concept. The first Christians recognized it in Jesus who gave his life on the cross. "From now on the reign belongs to our God and the authority to his Christ" (Revelation 12:10). God's reign is the love with which Jesus loved. It is the Spirit of God who sends this same love into human hearts (see Romans 5:5). The Gospel assures us that, in spite of short-term appearances, the future belongs to those who love and who forgive.

This hope concerns all humanity. That is why the early Christians could not keep it for themselves. They were public witnesses "before governors and kings" (Mark 13:9) and "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Proclaiming the Gospel does not mean spreading a religion that is superior to other ones. It simply means not keeping silent about our hope of peace.

What attitude towards other religions does our Christian faith require of us?

Today, many Christians live side by side with members of other faith communities. When a village, a town or a whole country was Christian, the relationship with other religions was primarily a theoretical question. Now, the question is more and more relevant in daily life.

During the time of the apostle Paul, the Christians of Rome did not live in a Christian society either. He wrote to them, "Live in peace with all if possible, to the extent that it depends on you" (Romans 12:18). These words encourage us to do all we can to defuse tensions and to avoid conflicts. Peaceful coexistence never depends on just one of the parties. But Paul insists that, with a view to peace, Christians should at least do what depends on them.

To live together in lasting peace, tolerance is not enough. Respecting others does not mean just leaving them alone. It means also being interested in them. To affirm that everyone has their own beliefs that are not open to discussion can be a subtle form of contempt. Is an authentic encounter really possible if each person excludes from it what is most precious for them? We share with our friends what causes each one of us to hope and to live. Christians cannot keep silent about the fact that Christ is their hope and their life. "Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is within you" (1 Peter 3:15).

Since each religion deals with the absolute, and since this absolute varies from one religion to another, religions contain a potential for conflict. So should we try to harmonize the different religions for the sake of peace, taking from each of them only those elements about which everyone can agree? A concern for harmony is not foreign to the Bible: "Be concerned with what is good in the sight of all" (Romans 12:17). Interreligious dialogue contributes to this search for the common good. When there is trust between the leaders of different religions, they can work together against violence and injustice.

But dialogue would not be sincere if it required the partners to give up the absolute which characterizes religions as such. With respect to Christians, we cannot deny the fact that at the center of our faith there is Jesus Christ, "the unique mediator between God and human beings" (1 Timothy 2:5). But far from making true dialogue impossible, this absolute commits us to it, since what makes Jesus unique is his humility. He became the servant of all. He took the last place. That is why we can never, in his name, lord it over others but only welcome them and let them welcome us.



God, you love us,  
and in you we can  
discover the  
meaning of our  
existence. It lies in  
giving our life for  
Christ and the  
Gospel.

**1 Fri** You yourselves are my witnesses, declares the Lord, you are those whom I have chosen.

**2 Sat** Jesus said: Any- one who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at commu- nity prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

**3 Sun** Jesus said: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

**4 Mon** The eyes of the Lord keep watch over those who love him. He revives the spirit and gives light to the eyes. He gives healing, life and bless- ing.

**5 Tue** St. Paul writes: Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**6 Wed** Jesus sent out his twelve disciples, saying: Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

**7 Thu** Paul writes: The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith.

**8 Fri** Peacemakers sow the seeds that will bear fruit in justice.

**9 Sat** God's wisdom is a reflection of the eternal light, an untarnished mirror of his active power and image of his good- ness.

**10 Sun** Jesus said: A sower went out to sow. Some seeds fell on good soil and pro- duced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Let anyone with ears listen!

**11 Mon** The Lord says: Do not be afraid. I am your God, your help, your strength and your salvation.

**12 Tue** Guide me in your truth and teach me, Lord, for you are the God who saves me.

**13 Wed** Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Seek first God's kingdom and his sav- ing justice and all other things will be given to you as well.

**14 Thu** The Lord says: Look, I am bringing recovery and healing to my people; I will reveal to them peace and faith- fulness in full measure.

**15 Fri** Paul writes: Now you have been set free from sin and are in the service of God, you will gain the holiness that leads to eternal life.

**16 Sat** This is what the Lord wants of you, only this: to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

**17 Sun** Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which someone took and sowed in their field. Of all seeds it is the smallest, yet once it has grown it is the big- gest of plants.

**18 Mon** Jesus said: I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because that is why I was sent.

**19 Tue** Human compas- sion extends to neighbours, but God's compassion extends to everyone.

**20 Wed** Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is no use to anyone.

**21 Thu** The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

**22 Fri** Jesus said: Happy are they who hear the word of God and obey it.

**23 Sat** There is no per- manent dwelling for us here, but we are looking for the one which is to come.

**24 Sun** Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a trader looking for precious pearls, who on finding one of great value, goes, sells every- thing he has and buys it.

**25 Mon** St JAMES We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, will also raise us up with Jesus and bring us to himself.

**26 Tue** Jesus said to his disciples: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again?

**27 Wed** The earth is full of your works, Lord. You send out your Spirit and life begins, you renew the face of the earth.

**28 Thu** Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

**29 Fri** St. Paul wrote to Timothy: Do not be ashamed to be a witness to our Lord who has saved us and given us a holy calling.

**30 Sat** The Lord says: Do not be afraid, my servant whom I have chosen. I shall pour out my Spirit on your offspring.

JULY

DAILY READINGS

**31 Sun** Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, who gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

Mt 14:13-21

Mt 13:44-52

Mt 13:31-32

Mt 13:1-9

Mt 11:28-30

Is 43:9-12

Mt 12:46-50

2 Co 4:7-15

Ps 104

Lk 4:42-44

Is 41:8-10

Rm 6:8-14

Is 7:22-8:1

Jm 3:13-18

Mt 5:13-16

Sl 18:8-14

Ps 25

Mt 9:36-10:8

Rm 1:8-17

Is 44:1-4

Ps 104

Sl 30:21-25

Mt 6:25-34

Rm 6:20-23

Is 44:1-4

Rm 12:3-8

Ezk 36:24-27

Jr 32:1-8

Rm 6:20-23

Is 44:1-4

2 Tm 1:6-11

Lk 11:27-28

Rm 6:20-23

Is 44:1-4



# AUGUST

# DAILY READINGS

- 7 SUN** Mt 14:22-33 Jesus came towards his disciples, walking on the water, and they were terrified; but at once he said to them: Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.

**8 Mon** Zc 8:11-17 The Lord says: I shall save you and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid!

**9 Tue** 1 Co 13:1-13 Paul writes: Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.

**10 Wed** Is 61:10-11 the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in garments of salvation.

**11 Thu** Ac 4:1-22 When the Sanhedrin forbade them to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John replied, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

**12 Fri** Ph 1:3-11 Paul writes: I am confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the day of Christ Jesus comes.

**13 Sat** Mt 20:24-28 Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the forgiveness of many.

**1 Mon** 1 Jn 2:3-11 Whoever loves their brother or sister lives in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

**2 Tue** 2 Tm 1:12-14 Paul writes to Timothy: With the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, keep safe the good deposit of faith given to you.

**3 Wed** Ps 119:49-56 Your will is a song for me. In the night I remember your name, Lord.

**4 Thu** 2 Tm 2:22-26 St. Paul writes: A servant of the Lord must not engage in quarrels but should be welcoming to all and patient in adversity.

**5 Fri** Hos 14:2-9 The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart.

**6 Sat** Mt 17:1-8 TRANSFIGURATION On the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, a bright cloud covered the disciples and a voice said: This is my beloved Son on whom my favour rests; listen to him.

**7 SUN** Mt 16:13-20 Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

**8 Mon** Jn 6:27-29 The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

**9 Tue** Ga 6:1-10 Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

**10 Wed** Is 61:1-3 The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

**11 Thu** Ps 103 Bless the Lord, my soul; let all that is in me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul; forget none of his good deeds.

**12 Fri** Jn 13:31-35 Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

**13 Sat** Mt 28:16-20 Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

**14 SUN** Rm 11:29,33-36 Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

**15 Mon** Lk 1:39-56 THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who reverence him.

**16 Tue** 1 Co 13:8-13 Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.

**17 Wed** Jm 1:22-25 James writes: Do not only listen to the Word, put it into practice.

**18 Thu** Jn 14:11-19 Jesus said to his disciples: I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

**19 Fri** 2 Co 3:16-18 Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

**20 Sat** Rm 12:14-21 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

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**26 Fri** Jn 12:23-36 Jesus said: When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to me.

**27 Sat** Mt 28:16-20 Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

**28 SUN** Mt 16:24-26 Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

**29 Mon** Jn 6:27-29 The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

**30 Tue** Jr 32:37-41 The Lord says: I shall make an everlasting covenant with my people: never to cease in my efforts for their good.

**31 Wed** Mt 18:12-14 Jesus said: If a shepherd finds one sheep that was lost, it gives him more joy than ninety-nine others that did not stray at all. In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want even one to be lost.
- Christ Jesus, in the Gospel you tell us not to linger over what has wounded us. And your forgiveness becomes a kind of miracle in our lives.
- These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.



This passage is surprising, paradoxical, difficult. We can allow it to explain itself through some questions it asks us.

1. What is human wisdom? Could it perhaps be defined as the art of living well in order to be happy? Then folly would mean heading towards failure and unhappiness. Still, we need to know where happiness is found, and discover that realistically speaking it is not possible to be happy all alone, without others.

2. Why does Saint Paul speak so negatively about this wisdom? Because it was in the name of human wisdom that Jesus was condemned to death: he disturbed the established order, called social hierarchies into question, forced people to change their idea of God. He appeared to be a politically dangerous fool, a madman.

3. Where then is true wisdom to be found? Saint Paul answers: in the *language of the cross*. Language here means that we have acquired some distance on this event and refers, beyond the mere fact of the cross, to its meaning in the context of Jesus' life and then in the light of his resurrection, all this situated in the overarching plan of God's covenant with us.

4. Why is the cross—the worst failure, and utter folly, since Jesus really did nothing to escape it—the language of God's wisdom? Because it reveals the power of love and it shows how far Jesus' gift of his life goes. It was the rejection of God by the "wise", and God turned it into total solidarity with the "fools" that we are. It was the condemnation of Jesus for blasphemy, and Jesus turned it into the forgiveness of those who crucified him and the return of human beings to God.

5. What will we do so that the *language of the cross* may become more and more the criterion of our human wisdom? So that our idea of happiness may be enlightened by the folly of Jesus' love? So that our art of living well may conform to that total gift of self that is the life—and the death—of Jesus?

Peter was depressed after he disowned Jesus three times on the eve of the Passion. When the risen Jesus meets Peter again, however, he questions him not about what he has done but about what is deepest and truest in him, about his love. He knows that this has not disappeared in Peter, in spite of everything.

After each question, Jesus entrusts Peter with a responsibility. Precisely this weak and sinful person is loved and is called to respond. Anyone who takes on responsibilities in the communion of the Church has to discover this. To accept responsibility never means to play a role, or to show that we are strong and holy. Whoever accepts responsibility does not pretend to be better than others. The question they have to answer is not: "Are you strong; will you be capable?" But: "Do you love me? Can you love?"

Three times Peter answers: "You know..." What would we have answered? Peter must have realised how imperfectly he had behaved. Yet he does not say: "Yes, I do love you a little", or: "I will try to love you more." Had he done so, Peter would have been himself the measure of love. Instead, he leaves behind all measuring and analyzing himself, just as earlier he jumped out of the boat (v. 7). He entrusts himself to Jesus, as to a real friend. From now on, Jesus' friendship and love carries him. Peter does not say: "I can", or: "I will..." But: "You, you!" Then it is no longer our ability to love, or mere feelings, which are at the centre. Instead, a living person becomes the source of our love; he comes to complete our imperfect love and acts. Our weakness, even our sin, is not an obstacle for his love. From now on I can leave my weakness to Jesus. He can transform it into something I cannot imagine. And he can make me a witness of his love to others, without my knowing how.

- Jesus questions us about love. Where do I see most clearly that love is at the heart of my responsibilities?
- What experiences have shown me that love is more than a feeling, that we can even love without feelings of love?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

after the difficult journey and the trials they have undergone, fall prey to fear or weariness and let the dynamism which is a mark of every Christian vocation grow weak. It can also happen that institutions, because of routine or the deficiencies of their members, are not sufficiently at the service of the Gospel message. Because of this, the Church needs the witness of your hope and your zeal in order to fulfil her mission better.

Do not be content to criticize passively or to wait for persons or institutions to become better. Go towards the parishes, the student organizations, the different movements and communities, and patiently bring them the force of your youth and the talents you have received. Bring your trust and support to the ministers of the Church; they are your

servants in the name of Jesus, and for that reason you need them. The Church needs your presence and your participation. If you remain within the Church, you will of course at times be upset by divisions, internal tensions and the sorry state of its members, but you will receive from Christ, who is the Head, his Word of Truth, his own Life, and the Breath of Love that will enable you to love him faithfully and to make your life a success by risking it in a joyful gift for others. (...)"

After finishing his talk, the pope kneels down for a few moments of prayer in the midst of the brothers. All sing "Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum" ("Praise the Lord, all nations"). While the young people keep

singing in the church and the tents, the pope goes downstairs into a nearby room to meet with the brothers. After greeting them one by one, he addresses the community.

## Today you are even younger

The pope reminds the brothers that he has personally known the community for a long time: "I visited you when you were younger. But today you are even younger." He recalls Brother Roger's visits to Poland and his words concerning the Virgin Mary and the





*The pope prays in the Church of Reconciliation with the community and the young.*

ministry of a universal pastor. So John Paul II "evidently felt obliged, not outwardly, but in his heart, to come and see you." Alluding to the two young adult European meetings that already have taken place in Rome, the pope adds, "Rome is always open to your visit with the young."

Then the pope leaves the community a written message that touches the brothers very deeply. Brother Roger will place that message in the *Sources of Taizé*, a book that sums up the essential intuitions of the community's life.

It is time to go. John Paul II walks out, approaches his car, then suddenly decides to return to the church to greet the young people one last time. "I have to tell you that I am leaving," he tells them. "And with sadness. But the pope must obey! He has many superiors!" A peal of laughter rings out, quickly followed by applause, and the singing begins once again as the pope sets off.

## Albania

God can make us understand what he wants from us

*A brother writes:* I have just come back from a ten-day visit to Albania, a country we have not visited for several years. The visit helped me better to understand the reality of the young people we welcome here during the summer and for the European meetings. It was important for those young people, for Europe is not very interested in what happens there.

The country is very beautiful, small but "complete", with mountains, the sea, hills, a landscape and a culture that are very rich.

What strikes one is how the Communist past is omnipresent. Bunkers are visible everywhere—there are 800,000 throughout the country—like mushrooms, in the towns, near homes, in fields. When you look at the situation of the Church and the young in the Church, everything is still marked by the communist period there too.

I began my visit in the North, at Scutari, an important city in the country's history but abandoned by the political authorities. The roads are so bad that the priests have to travel by jeep to visit people in the villages.

In that town I met an elderly priest who had been in prison for twelve years. He said he was glad to have been released, given the number of priests and religious who were killed in the past.

In that city of Scutari, we had a meeting from Friday to Sunday with young people from the whole country. Three hundred young people came from different cities to spend three days living a bit as they do in Taizé. They had prepared beautiful prayers, turning a room into a chapel. There were bible introductions and small sharing-groups. The meeting was touching. You have to take a lot of time and talk yourself for a good while before the young people will begin to share something of their life. In the evening, young people came to talk personally, and the conversations were surprisingly profound. These young people are searching and need to be encouraged.

The majority of the country is Muslim, though few practice their faith. Christians make up 30% of the population, 20% Orthodox and 10% Catholic.

I met young Orthodox Christians who were in Taizé last summer, professors at the Orthodox theological school. I also met an Orthodox bishop. We spoke about the young people who are looking for meaning in their life, a direction, a calling. He asked me, "What do you tell those young people?" I told him we do not give answers; we try to encourage them and tell them that God has the means to make us understand what he wants from us. He looked at me with surprise and asked, "That's what you tell the young people?" Afraid that he was displeased with my answer, I felt the sweat roll down my back and I said, "Yes." "Wonderful!" he replied. "In Albania, we have told people for too long what to do or not to do, what to believe or not to believe." He understood that we tell the young that it is up to them to search in a personal way, that they shouldn't expect answers from someone else, but rather keep searching in faith. The bishop went on: "We have to help the young people to realize that when they do something for others, when they give their time freely, they are the first ones who benefit from it. They get back something unexpected." The bishop concluded by saying that, in this context, the experience of Taizé was important because it does not give ready-made answers, but rather attempts to give the young confidence and a sense of responsibility for their life with others, which seems to have been wiped out to a large extent by Communism.

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